Final Degree Dissertation

Citizens of the Third Space

and the Pain of (Un)Belonging

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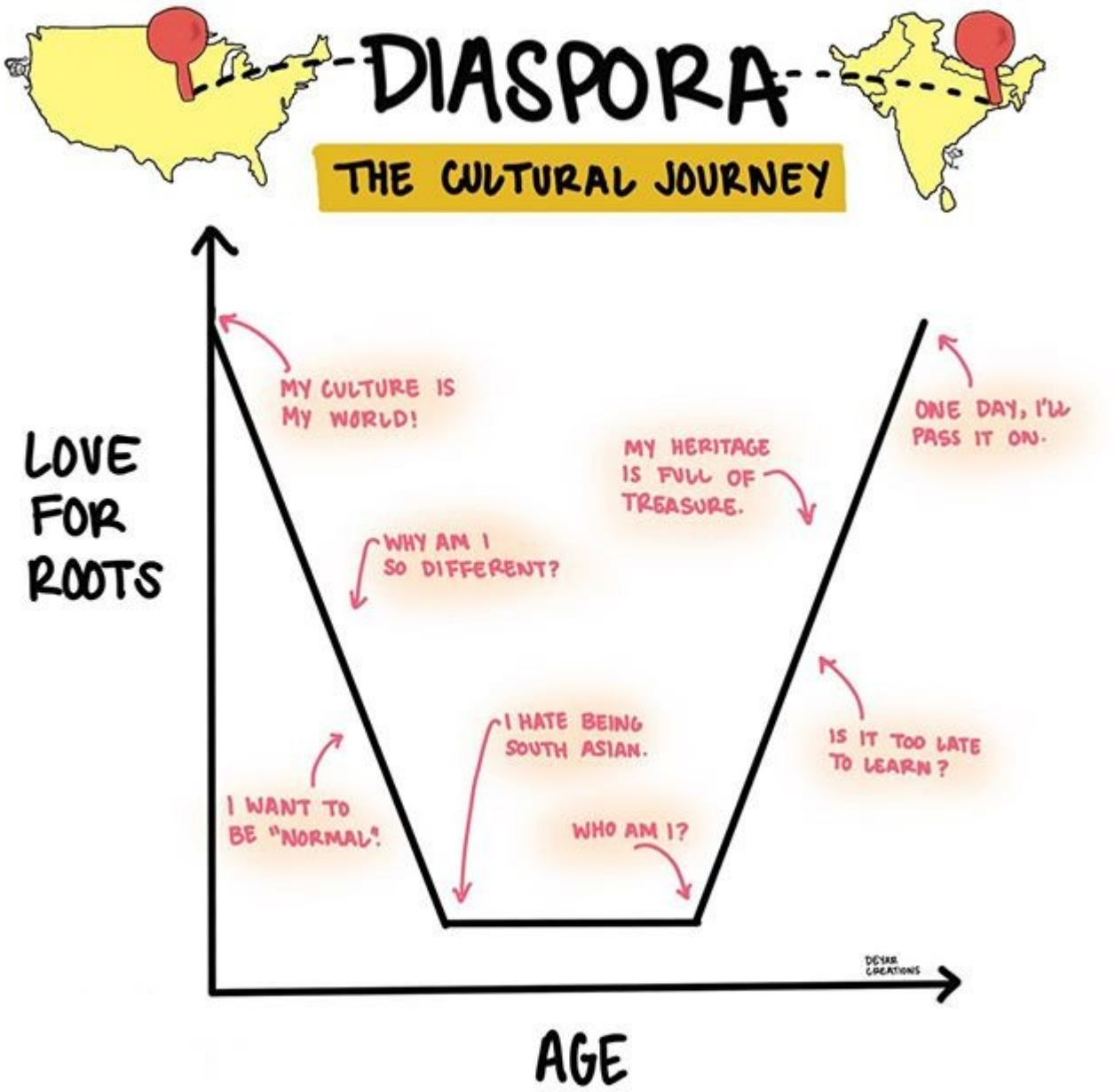

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Abstract

This Final Degree Dissertation aims to understand and analyse the construction, evolution and definition of diaspora identity within second-generation immigrants from former British colonies. Its objective is to determine whether this contemporary generation of writers has been able to reassess and reaffirm their emerging hybridity in a transnational context. By means of analysing some specific literary works, it aims to bring to the fore this emergent and renewed discourse about religion, race, cultural identity, ethnicity, language and social equality. The specific group of interest that will be dealt with in the present study is mainly comprised of authors of South Asian origin, namely from India and Pakistan, who currently live predominantly in English-speaking western countries.

The dissertation will be divided into several chapters and sub-sections. By means of providing a comprehensive historical background, the relation between colonisation, decolonisation and succeeding migration of the former colonised will be analysed, together with how this chain of historical events has affected the transnational and hybrid identity of trans-migrants. Subsequently, the terms hybridity, migration, diaspora and the concept of the Third Space will be discussed, as they represent main points of reference in this work. In the following chapter, examples of contemporary writers of South Asian origin and their literature will be provided in relation to current social and political events, the use of language and Islamophobia, among other things, and will be subsequently analysed with the help of theories put forward by well-known postcolonial critics. Lastly, the conclusion will summarize and evaluate how the renewed attitude of contemporary diasporic writers towards discussed issues and their perception of themselves and their surroundings is being reflected in popular literature, thus creating a discourse that can somehow contribute to influencing and even modifying contemporary society.

Resumen

Este Trabajo de Fin de Grado tiene como objetivo comprender y analizar la construcción, evolución y definición de la identidad de la diáspora entre los inmigrantes de segunda generación de las antiguas colonias británicas. Su objetivo es determinar si esta generación contemporánea de escritores ha podido reevaluar y reafirmar su hibridación emergente en un contexto transnacional. Mediante el análisis de algunas obras literarias concretas, este trabajo pretende traer a un primer plano este discurso emergente y renovado sobre religión, raza, identidad cultural, etnia, lenguaje e igualdad social. El grupo de interés que se tratará en el presente estudio está compuesto por autoras procedentes del sur de Asia, principalmente de India y Pakistán, que actualmente viven en países occidentales de habla inglesa.

El trabajo se dividirá en varios capítulos y subsecciones. Después de proporcionar un resumen histórico, se analizará la relación entre colonización, descolonización y las migraciones de los ex colonizados, junto con cómo esta cadena de hechos históricos afectó a la identidad transnacional e híbrida de los transmigrantes. Posteriormente, se analizarán los términos hibridación, migración, diáspora y el concepto del Tercer Espacio, ya que representan puntos principales de referencia en este estudio. En el siguiente capítulo, se proporcionarán ejemplos de escritoras contemporáneas procedentes del sur de Asia y sus obras en relación a los acontecimientos sociales y políticos actuales, el uso del lenguaje y la islamofobia, entre otras cosas, y se analizarán posteriormente con la ayuda de conocidas teorías de críticos poscoloniales. Por último, la conclusión resumirá y evaluará cómo la actitud renovada de los escritores diaspóricos contemporáneos hacia los temas anteriormente mencionados y su percepción de ellos mismos y su entorno se refleja en la literatura popular, creando así un discurso que puede contribuir de alguna manera a influir e incluso modificar la sociedad contemporánea.

1.1. The Colonisation Process in India

In the eighteenth century, the Mughal dynasty (Muslim), which had ruled the Indian sub-continent since 1526, together with the Marathas (Hindu kings) started to lose power in favour of the English East India Company (EIC), which was granted its royal charter in 1600. Subsequently, the EIC began its gradual transformation from a trading company into a semi-autonomous state, to soon become the actual ruling power in India. It managed to expand its sphere of control through military action and through strategic alliances with Indian rulers.

Unlike the colonisation of North America and Australasia, there were never large numbers of British emigrants or settlers arriving on the Indian sub-continent. However, their presence and the concomitant imposition of the British rule had substantial effects on the indigenous people. Some territories, such as Bengal, suffered economic decline and famine, as well as notable social changes such as the growth of the middle-class and the decline of the old aristocratic classes. Moreover, the English language became more and more important, mainly due to the activities of the missionaries and the EIC's need to recruit English-speaking intermediaries. According to Macaulay, who was part of the project "The English Education Act in 1835," it was only through the introduction of English culture and language that any improvement in India could be achieved. Therefore, and as Macaulay put it, they wanted to educate and create "a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (in Gopal 2009: 16).

As a result of the 1857-58 mutiny, all power was transferred from the British East India Company to direct rule from Britain, and India became the most prized British colony, to the point of being known as 'the Jewel in the Crown.' In the nineteenth century, the Hindu urban middle-class elite around Calcutta, who came to be known as the *bhaldralok* or 'respectable people,' initiated the Bengal Renaissance. The conception of India as a great, old and prestigious nation emerged thanks to the writings and influence of the thinkers and writers belonging to this movement. They wanted to emphasise the idea that Asian civilisations had been wealthy and strong in ancient times but had somehow degenerated because of the Muslim influence; hence they wanted to retrieve the glory and

prestige they had supposedly had in previous times by creating this idea of nation, a Hindu India.

Significantly enough, these writers were bilingual, they could speak and write in both Bengali and English. This might be seen as the turning point, as the beginning of Indian writing in English. The concept of bilingualism is explained by Raja Rao in the preface of his novel *Kanthapura* (1967):

> English is not really an alien language to us. […] We are all instinctively bilingual, many of us writing in our own language and in English. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. […] Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect which will someday prove to be as distinctive and colourful as the Irish or the American. Time alone will justify it. (vii)

With the passing of time, more and more Indians were against the British presence on their territory, and Indian writers used different literary genres, in particular the novel, in order to denounce the colonisation process. The rise of anti-colonial feeling in British India in the 1920s encouraged leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi to start popular mass movements to campaign against the British Raj, mainly with the help of peaceful methods. These independence movements mainly opposed British rule by favouring non-violent methods such as non-cooperation, civil disobedience and economic resistance, although it is also true that some others adopted a rather more militant approach in their attempt to overthrow British rule with armed struggle.

Along with this desire for independence, tensions between Hindus and Muslims had been developing over the years, and were subsequently prompted by the Bengal Renaissance. As a result of their mutual antagonism, in August 1947 the British Indian Empire was divided into the Union of India and the Dominion of Pakistan. The Partition, which in particular affected the territories of Punjab and Bengal, led to extreme rioting between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, finally leaving more than two million deaths and one of the largest mass migrations known in modern history, with a total of twelve million Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims moving between the newly created nations of India and Pakistan. In 1971, Bangladesh, formerly East Bengal, seceded from Pakistan. The fatal consequences of this can also be felt nowadays: "Partition disrupted the lives of millions of people. Scholars claim that the Partition was not an event that occurred in 1947, but has been continuing on in the form of contemporary politics in South Asia" ("The Partition of Punjab," *Feminisminindia*).

The Partition and its genocidal consequences undoubtedly affected the cultural and literary

life of the Indian sub-continent: in the face of this horror very few writers dared to talk about all this and describe the circumstances of the partition. This literary silence lasted for more than twenty years, as it was not until the 1960s that writers could start writing about it all, once they became fully aware of what had happened in the past; as is well known, traumatic events are difficult to acknowledge at the time they occur; a period of latency is always required for survivors and their descendants to be able to re-visit and re-member their traumatic past.

1.2. The Fall of the British Empire

Imperialism was of great importance for British people, as their national identity became fused with their perception of being an imperial power; they identified the British Empire with Britishness itself, and clang to the conviction that they were especially fit to rule over other 'inferior' peoples. However, after losing its power over the Indian sub-continent, Britain no longer had the means nor the will to maintain an overseas empire, with the result that it gradually declined. The symbolic and final 'end of empire' happened in 1997, when the control of the island of Hong Kong was handed back to China. To make up for the end of their power, the Commonwealth of Nations, an association of fifty-four sovereign states, most of which are English-speaking as they were former British colonies, was formally constituted in 1949.

During the long process of colonisation and the subsequent negotiation of independence, state borders were altered, and postcolonial critics and theories brought about important changes in the identity of the formerly colonised. Yet, due to the economic, political, technological, cultural and linguistic impact of colonial domination, these countries are still under the grip of the former imperial powers. This is the phenomenon usually labelled as 'neocolonialism.' Jean Paul Sartre's *Colonialism and Neocolonialism* (1964) contains the first recorded use of this term, which is defined as the subtle propagation of socio-economic and political activity on the part of former colonial rulers with the aim of reinforcing capitalism, neo-liberal globalisation, and the cultural subjugation of their former colonies. This especially refers to the on-going economic, political, military, and cultural exploitation of the Asian and African nation states, also called Third World by

their former ruling powers. To put it differently, colonialism is still alive nowadays, as former colonies may be politically independent in theory, but remain dependent on their former metropoles in practice. Neocolonialism implies a link between three elements: economy (economical); the control of nation-states (political); and business interests as embodied in multicultural corporations (commercial).

The legacy and influence of British imperial domination persists, as Edward Said argues in his work *Culture and Imperialism* (1993): "No one today is purely one thing. […] Imperialism consolidated the mixture of cultures and identities on a global scale" (336). Reversing the journey initially made by British emigrants and settlers, people from the colonies and former colonies travelled to Britain after the Second World War, as they had been granted the right to live and work in the UK. This was made possible by The British Nationality Act of 1948, which conferred the status of 'citizen of the UK and colonies' to all Commonwealth citizens. This led, among other things, to a substantial increase of immigration to the UK from the West Indies and the Indian sub-continent. These migrants, however, were received with a hostile attitude, as the British feared economic competition and had internalised the belief in their racial superiority over them. This would eventually lead to the removal of the legal right to citizenship by further legislation, but not before many immigrant communities had already settled in British cities. Their presence nowadays, together with their contribution to the national cultural life, serve as a reminder of Britain's imperial past.

2.1 Hybridity and the Third Space

In the past, the term 'hybridity' was a derogatory term, used to refer to those mixed breed and the product of miscegenation. To counter this loaded historical past, its meaning was challenged by Homi K. Bhabha, a leading figure in contemporary postcolonial studies. He stated: "hybridity to me is the 'third space,' which enables other positions to merge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom" (1994: 211). Subverting the colonial

discourse with his theory of cultural differences, he provided a new concept of hybridity which is related to what he called the Third Space, an idea that is in turn closely connected to liminality. Homi K. Bhabha stressed the advantage of in-betweeness by disputing the existence of a culture that can be qualified as pure or essential, given that cultures are in a constant process of transformation and renewal. Hence, that liminal or in-between space, where the cutting edge of translation and negotiation occurs, is what he defines as the Third Space. This space blurs pre-existing boundaries, challenges standard definitions of culture and identity and goes against all kinds of colonial binary thinking.

Bhabha also argues that cultural production is most creative when it is indecisive, which can be particularly true when discussing the diaspora and how contemporary writers of migrant origin assess their own evolving hybridity through their writings. On a more contemporary note, Manawar (2014) states that this Third Space can be a virtual entity created by the new generations that embrace new media to combat negative representations of themselves and their culture. Writers who, through new technological vehicles, enhance their ever-changing hybrid and transnational outlook which, shared with a similar internationally fraternal and diasporic community of interest, provides them with credibility and much-needed security. According to Manawar (2014: 273):

> In the third space, this digital diaspora remain between two societies, two cultures and two hemispheres, and maintain transnational affiliations and communities. For some it may remain a constant journey of exploration. Others may feel that this 'safe' space is where they wish to remain and perpetuate their new media 'transmigrant' status, obtaining the best of both worlds and maintaining a fluid identity. Others, particularly the most advantaged of the diaspora, will continually affirm their status in Britain, with faith being discreet and deculturalised. […] Such a group may reflect the mimicry of Western culture and social norms Bhabha […] refers to.

It seems clear that, for this author, this 'new space' has allowed the diaspora to challenge what they perceive as injustices, as members of the diaspora exist in this juxtaposition of the two worlds they feel they belong. However, for Bhabha, when you mix up two cultures together, being A the country of origin and B the host country, the outcome is not simply the juxtaposition of A and B. The fusion of A and B does not solely mean bringing all the rules, notions and ideas that they both encapsulate together. A and B will turn into C, that is, a different entity whatsoever, as in a chemical reaction: two elements are brought together and become, at the end of the process, a different product. C implies the coming together of two different cultures, but it also implies those

black holes and gaps that result from their conflation but cannot be possibly explained by making exclusive reference to the elements that originated it.

This third space ties in with with Bhabha's work on identity and belonging, which is systematically echoed in the narratives of contemporary writers, as will be shown in the following section. Manawar also mentions the process of mimicry which Bhabha analysed in combination with mockery and sly civility. According to these critics, mimicry inexorably implies mockery, as the internalisation of all the dominant/mainstream notions, rules and techniques goes hand in hand with some internal critique, given the fact that migrants, like the former colonised, challenge and undermine all of these dominant rules in a conscious or unconscious way.

2.2. Diaspora and the Recent History of South Asian Migration to English-speaking Countries

Etymologically, the word 'diaspora' has its origin in the Greek translation around 250 BC of the Old Testament verb *diaspepeiren,* which means 'to sow over.' It was used to describe the scattering of people due to divine punishment as shown from Deuteronomy to the Psalms, and "invokes images of multiple journeys" (Brah 1996: 181). More recently, the term has been adapted and adopted by writers and postcolonial scholars to refer to forced and voluntary migrations set in motion by imperial enterprises. Its meaning can therefore be related to the different colonial processes. As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin argue: "Colonialism itself was a radically diasporic movement, involving the temporary or permanent dispersion and settlement of millions of Europeans over the entire world" (1998: 69). Nowadays the term encompasses many different meanings, and that is because postcolonial critics use it to challenge the supremacy of the national paradigm, as the term describes not only the geographical phenomenon, but also a theoretical concept: a way of thinking, of representing the world. Tölölyan (1991: 4) relates it to the "immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest worker, exile community, ethnic community […] the vocabulary of transnationalism."

Given the multiple meanings of the term, it is easy to find contradictions and indecisions in both personal and group struggles to accomplish the process of formation of a new hybrid identity.

This uncertainty is a reminder of the constant negotiations that take place within the diaspora, both at a deep personal level and in group interactions. These ambivalences are not only inevitable, but also needed, to test out individual experiences of exploration and the potential affirmation of a hybrid sense of belonging. Moreover, it should also be taken into account that the South Asian diaspora represents an extremely diverse group as regards religious discipline, branch of faith, ethnicity, social class, education and geographical differences regarding both their country of origin and the host country. Safran (2011: 83) provides a rather more complex definition when he asserts that the concept of diaspora should be related to

> expatriate minority communities whose members share several of the following characteristics:
> 1. They or their ancestors have been dispersed from a specific original to two or more peripheral or foreign regions;
> 2. They retain a collective memory, vision or myth about their original homeland its physical location, history and achievements;
> 3. They believe they are not and perhaps cannot be accepted by their host society and therefore feel alienated and insulated from it;
> 4. They regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return when conditions are acceptable.

Although this characterisation of diaspora surely applies to first-generation immigrants, their descendants are becoming increasingly interested in formulating a diasporic identity that seeks to accommodate both Eastern and Western ways of behaviour. This shows a strong correlation with transnationalism, given the nature of their parents' relationship with the homeland and their own need to integrate inherited traditions and cultures with the connection they feel with the culture of their host country, which they regard as their true home, from which to meet present and future aspirations. This approach is articulated by Manawar (2014: 244) as follows:

> This multiple heritage in many ways gives them pride, albeit cautiously defined within their own parameters of understanding that often highlighted the dichotomy apparent through cognitive dissonance of who and what they really were. Such issues all fed into what can be best termed as a complex mosaic of identity formation within these groups, that in many ways may well be the last vestiges of cultural and linguistic links with parents and grandparents born and brought up in rural [areas in their home countries]. It may be that the third and subsequent diaspora generations will be different both linguistically and culturally.

This suggests that many members of the second- and third-generation South Asian diaspora can be rather more assertive than their parents, as they have grown up challenging racism rather than accepting or denying it, and are unapologetic about their origins and the colour of their skin. They embody a *mélange* of identities that straddle East and West, are more political and do not

conform to the prejudices and stereotyping that mainstream culture used to define the lives of the first migrants coming from the Indian sub-continent.

Hanif Kureishi (1986: 38), to give but one example, argued that: "It is the British, the white British, who have to learn that being British isn't what it was. Now it is a more complex thing, involving new elements," which basically means that this Anglo-centric/Euro-centric attitude is being challenged from within by many of these authors, who are eager to create new discourses. The vocabulary and the meaning of particularly offensive words are also being questioned. To give but some examples, some decades ago terms such as 'arrivant' were used in a pejorative way, but now these authors are using them with pride to define themselves, as they feel confident enough to tell their own stories. In keeping with this, Stuart Hill (1995) said: "identity is not in the past to be found, but in the future to be constructed."

Migration is a process encompassing any kind of population movement regardless of its length, composition, or cause, either across an international border or within a state. It includes the migration of refugees, displaced persons, uprooted people, and economic migrants ("World Migration Report 2003"). Employment opportunities and higher wages are the main driving forces for migration, but other common benefits of migration are better educational opportunities for children, better household/food availability, and the possibility to afford health services. On the other hand, migrants make a huge contribution to the economy and culture of their source/destination countries by filling labour-market needs in high-skill and low-skill segments of the market, rejuvenating populations, improving labour-market efficiency, promoting entrepreneurship, spurring urban renewal, and injecting dynamism and diversity into destination countries and societies ("Global Employment Trends for Youth, August 2010").

Ceri Peach (1994: 38-55) summarizes the South Asian migration overseas in three phases: two main periods of direct outflow and a third period of secondary movement. The first period is that dominated by the Indenture movement which took place within the British imperial system and lasted from 1834 to 1920. The second main phase is that of the post-war period of free market migration and affected Britain in particular, but also the United States, Canada, some European

countries and the Middle East. The third movement overlaps the previous one and shares with it many of the destinations. This is the secondary migration, often carried out by the descendants of the first-phase migration.

A 2019 study by *SAALT* (South Asian Americans Leading Together) on South Asian demography revealed a community in the United States that is growing almost as fast as it is changing. By 2065, Asian Americans are expected to be the largest immigrant population there. As a matter of fact, South Asian population has grown a staggering 40% in seven years, from 3.5 million in 2010 to 5.4 million in 2017. The Indian diaspora is the largest diasporic movement from Asia, with this Indian community numbering over 25 million around the world. According to a UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs report (2009), India was projected to rank ninth in terms of number of international migrants in 2010 and to account for 2.5 per cent of all international migrants.

3.1 South-Asian Diasporic Writers and the Ambivalence of Writing in English

Diasporic authors have been given many different labels: transnational writers, global authors and world authors, among others. Most of them have chosen to write in English, since this language has become the world's *lingua franca* and can thus reach a larger audience. As Salman Rushdie (1981: 17) explains:

> Those of us who do use English do so in spite of our ambiguity towards it, or perhaps because of that, perhaps because we can find in that linguistic struggle a reflexion of other struggles taking place in the real world, struggles between the cultures within ourselves and the influences at work upon our societies. To conquer English may be to complete the process of making ourselves free.

Great writers and thinkers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were aware of other cultures, but always regarded their own culture as the most valuable and the one and only that could define them and their existence. Nowadays, however, the diasporic condition has become the norm and not the exception. As a matter of fact, many contemporary writers are diasporic, and feel they do not have a unique mother culture and tongue; they let themselves become part of more than one culture, which enables them to have a double, even multiple perspective. In other words, diasporic

writers can partake of more than one cultural tradition, which enables them to have a privileged vision. In the past, being an in-between was considered to be something negative, but nowadays the Indian diaspora has become an ever-growing force, not only due to the migration of Indian people, but also because of the popularity of Indian literature, Indian food, Indian spirituality and Indian culture altogether. To give but one example, Jhumpa Lahiri is a diasporic author who has dared to articulate and celebrate this multiple vision. Her parents are Indian but she was born in London, lived in America for most of her life, and is currently living in Italy and writing in Italian, which clearly testifies to how tremendously versatile these diasporic writers can be. She embodies transnationality itself, as she is a global writer who does not belong to just one place. As a diasporic author, she has expressed her concern, not only regarding the use of English, but also the constraints of language itself. Like her, many other contemporary authors, such as Warsan Shire, Aman Batra, Nikita Gill, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh and Rohinton Mistry, to mention but some, are tackling similar issues. To illustrate this, in the following section a selection of poems by contemporary diasporic female authors Rupi Kaur and Fatimah Asghar will be discussed.

3.2. Rupi Kaur

Rupi Kaur, a poet, illustrator and novelist, was born into a Sikh family in Punjab, India. She immigrated to Canada with her parents when she was four years old. A distinguishable feature of her poetry is that she only uses lowercase and periods when writing it. On her official website she explains it as "a visual manifestation and ode to my identity as a diasporic Punjabi Sikh woman" (rupikaur.com). She further explains that her mother tongue (Punjabi) is written in Gurmukhi script, in which there are neither uppercase nor lowercase letters, and the only punctuation that exists is a period, which makes her poetry quite symmetrical and straightforward. She describes it as "a visual representation of what I want to see more of within the world: equalness. […] It is less about breaking the rules of English (although that's pretty fun) but more about tying in my own history and heritage within my work" (rupikaur.com).

"first generation immigrant"

they have no idea what it is like
to lose home at the risk of
never finding home again
have your entire life
split between two lands and
become a bridge between two countries.

This short poem exemplifies the idea of in-betweenness and fluidity, of not belonging to any specific country that one can call 'home,' while at the same time creating a bridge between two different cultures. This said bridge could be related to Bhabha's Third Space, as it can bridge the gap between East and West, thus accommodating the two halves of her existence into a transnational context that allows her to partake of contrasting ideological systems, traditions, cultures and societal norms from two different hemispheres.

Throughout the poem, the poetic speaker refers to those who are not part of the diasporic community as ignorant and indifferent to the issues that affect the diaspora. The ongoing evolution and transformation of her identity is a relevant concern for the speaker, who feels marginalised and subject to discrimination. The social norm of conforming to Western values has led the contemporary diaspora to find solace in the aforementioned 'bridge,' which is a fusion between their heritage and their efforts to forge a new identity: "have your entire life / split between two lands" (lines 4-5).

The poetic speaker defines her country of birth as a lost home. This can be related to Salman Rushdie's concept of an imaginary homeland. In his essay "Imaginary Homelands" he explores how tranmigrants create a romanticised relationship with their heritage as they look for something similar to a sanctuary abroad, a potential refuge from their current host country, to make up for their sense of loss. He argues, however, that there are hundreds of million possible versions of that imaginary land, as those authors writing outside their country cannot but have a fragmentary vision. Nonetheless, Rushdie advocates the use of English and freedom of speech for international writers: "the past we belong to is an English past" (1981: 20).

i think about the way my father pulled the family out of poverty
without knowing what a vowel was.
and my mother raised 4 children
without being able to construct a perfect sentence in english
a discombobulated couple that landed in the new world
with hopes that left the bitter taste of rejection in their mouth.
no family no friends, just man and wife,
two university degrees that meant nothing,
one mother tongue that was broken now,
one swollen belly with a baby inside.
a father worried about jobs and rent
coz no matter what this baby was coming.

and they thought to themselves for a split second
was it worth it to put all of our money
into the dream of a country that is swallowing us whole.
and papa looks at his woman's eyes
and sees the loneliness living where the iris was.
wants to give her a home in a country
that looks at her with the word visitor wrapped around their tongue.
on their wedding day she left an entire village to be his wife
and now she left an entire country to be a warrior.
and when the winter came they had nothing,
but the heat of their own bodies to keep the coldness out.
and like 2 brackets they face one another
to hold the dearest parts of them,
their children close.

they turned a suitcase full of clothes
into a life and regular paychecks
to make sure that children of immigrants
wouldn't hate them for being the children of immigrants
they worked too hard - you can tell by their hands,
their eyes are begging for sleep
but our mouths were begging to be fed
and that is the most artistic thing I have ever seen.
it is poetry to these ears that has never heard
what passion sounds like
and my mouth is full of likes and uhms
when I look at their masterpiece
'coz there are no words in the English language
that can articulate that kind of beauty.

i can't compact their existence into 26 letters and call it a description
i tried once but the adjectives needed to describe them don't even exist
so I ended up with pages and pages full of words
followed with commas and more words and more commas
only to realize that there are some things in the world
so infinite that they can never use a full stop.

so how dare you mock your mother
when she opens her mouth
and broken English spills out.

her accent is thick like honey,
hold it with your life,
it's the only thing she has left from home.
don't stomp on that richness,
instead hang it up on the walls
of museums next to Dali and Van Gogh
her life is brilliant and tragic.
kiss the side of her tender cheek.
she already knows what it sounds like
to have an entire nation laugh when she speaks.
she's more than our punctuation and language.
we might be able to take pictures and write stories,
but she made an entire world for herself.
how's that for art

This poem makes reference to the early migrants from the East that Kabbani has defined as "transplanted communities" (1987: 5) moving from rural agrarian cultures to city life, and later on forming the present-day diaspora, a growing modern generation wishing to explore and contribute to the wider discourse. "broken english" deals with the issue of linguistic imperialism and also the generational gap between the first immigrants and their children, the adversities that they had to overcome in order to offer their children a better future, and how these should not judge them for trivial things such as their strong foreign accent. The issue of the use of English feeds into wider generational differences between these two groups, thus creating tensions and internal strife between the first migrants and their more assertive succeeding generations, whose first language is English. As immigrants in an English-speaking country, the first generation had to accept unskilled labour jobs and were treated as the 'other,' as people unable to fit in, who thus had to make do with discrimination as regards wages, work quality and working conditions, as illustrated in: "they worked too hard - you can tell by their hands" (line 31).

The poem also criticises the hypocritical American society, which is made up by "children of immigrants" but would "hate them for being the children of immigrants" (lines 29-30). As McDonald notes, Western theorists too often forget the West's own historical development when assessing other cultures (1996: 303). If the minorities want to fit into the host society and conform to the rules imposed by the majority, they need to have their culture fused into the dominant one, in other words, it is the migrant communities alone who must always adapt to the mainstream culture.

The concept of migrants, regarded by the natives as the 'other,' is present all through the poem. This could be related to Edward Said's ideas as put forward in *Orientalism* (1978), a book which meant a turning point in postcolonial studies. By means of examining various European representations of the Middle East, such as literary, scientific and journalistic texts, travel writings and anthologies of nineteenth-century translations, he concluded that the Western discourse about the Orient is discriminatory, as it portrays the colonised as backward and passive. Therefore, the West has objectified those under colonial domination by producing a biased discourse about non-metropolitan areas and cultures. Orientalism, in Said's words, is simply "a kind of Western projection onto and will to govern over the Orient" (1978: 95).

Lastly, the poetic speaker confronts those who were born from foreign parents and dare to judge them on account of their mastery of English, rather than on the efforts that they had to make in order to earn their own living in a foreign place. The cultural dislocation suffered by migrants coming from rural societies, as discussed by Kabbani (1987), was the sacrifice they made to provide their offspring with a better life. This is why their strong accent should never be mocked, but rather seen as art, as a cultural heritage, as proof of their courage, and should give them instead a sense of pride.

3.3. Fatimah Asghar

Fatimah Asghar is a Pakistani-Kashmiri-American poet and screenwriter whose parents immigrated to the United States before she was born. They both died by the time she was five, thus turning her into an orphan to be raised by other immigrants. In keeping with this, a recurrent theme in Asghar's work is finding a family that transcends blood ties; since members of the diaspora bond over a shared history, the notion of family should consequently transcend borders and blood ties alike. She relates the idea of being an orphan to that of being diasporic: "being a part of any kind of diaspora is such a beautifully haunting and strange experience, to kind of constantly be working back toward a place where your family has left, or were exiled from, or can't go back to […]. That's a kind of orphaning in its own self" (in Segal 2015).

She also speaks about history, Partition and borders and how they affect the daily life of survivors and their children; once the invisible line is drawn, people are divided on account of varying ideologies, faiths, and politics. To quote her own words: “There is a lot of historical amnesia in the world, and we just don’t know a lot of our own history” (in Segal 2015); her poems are some kind of memorial for the trauma she still dwells on, the emotional weight of forced migration that is still felt throughout her poetry.

Although the Partition was immensely traumatic for the entire South Asian sub-continent, there were communities and groups of people who were disproportionately affected, and most of these silenced victims happened to be women. It is estimated that about 75,000 women were raped, abducted or killed during the whole ordeal, while many more were forced into marriage and to convert, on both sides of the border. As can be read in “Abducted Women”:

> In the events that followed Partition, tens of thousands of women and girls suffered rape and abduction, others were murdered. Some of those who survived found their way back to their families and struggled to re-integrate themselves. In order to survive, many abducted women and girls were forced to build lives within new communities or were forced into prostitution. Others committed suicide, either as a means of preventing further dishonour, or following their return home.

This trauma was passed on to future generations; as is well known, transgenerational trauma can manifest itself in different ways, and its lethal effects can still be felt in the contemporary literature of the Indian diaspora, as they are still trying to cope with this grief, often resulting from unresolved emotions and thoughts that keep on haunting the individual.

“Partition”

you’re kashmiri until they burn your home. take your orchards. stake a different flag. until no one remembers the road that brings you back. you’re indian until they draw a border through punjab. until the british captains spit paki as they sip your chai, add so much foam you can’t taste home. you’re seraiki until your mouth fills with english. you’re pakistani until your classmates ask what that is. then you’re indian again. or some kind of spanish. you speak a language until you don’t. until you only recognise it between your auntie’s lips. your father was fluent in four languages. you’re illiterate in the tongues of your father. your grandfather wrote persian poetry on glasses. maybe. you can’t remember. you made it up. someone lied. you’re a daughter until they bury your mother. until you’re not invited to your father’s funeral. you’re a virgin until you get too drunk. you’re muslim until you’re not a virgin. you’re pakistani until they start throwing acid. you’re muslim until it’s too dangerous. you’re safe until you’re alone. you’re american until the towers fall. until there’s a border on your back.

This poem belongs to the collection of poems *If They Come For Us* (2018), in whose preface the reader can learn about the Partition of India. Asghar argues that the effects and divisions from Partition echo to this day, thus making it clear that there is a strong link between the Partition of India and her own partitioned identity. The poem comments on the legacies of wars and the mutual antagonism between India and Pakistan, the sorry memories of the Partition and a divided Kashmir: "you're indian until they draw a border through Punjab" (lines 2-3). This free verse poetry is the embodiment of how, for Asghar, history merges with the present and the future. The traumatic history of the South-Asian subcontinent reverberates in the poetic speaker's present-day experience as an American citizen. She inherited the trauma of her parents' forced migration, which affected her present-day experiences as a Muslim woman living in America. In another poem titled "Kal," Asghar defines the Hindi language as follows: "Allah, you gave us a language / where yesterday & tomorrow / are the same word," which clearly emphasises this fusion of past and future."

The lines "you're indian [...] until the british captains spit paki as they sip your chai" (lines 3-4) make reference to racism and race talk, which bell hooks (1995: 3) defines as "the explicit insertion into everyday life of racial signs and symbols that have no meaning other than pressing African-American (or other minorities) to the lowest level of racial hierarchy." The use of derogatory words such as "paki" is just another example of the lethal implications of race talk, which continually cites the racial minority in a negative light and is so deeply immersed within popular culture. The British captain is nothing but an allusion to former colonial masters who ruled the old empire, and who enforced negative racial and cultural stereotypes in narratives that took the superiority of the West for granted.

The poem also deals with the issue of Islamophobia, which could be defined as the hatred and fear of Islam, and is closely related to the 9/11 attacks that took place in New York in 2001: "you're american until the towers fall" (line 13). The ever-present resentment between East and West, described by Said as the division of the world into two, the Orient and Occident, is partly the outcome of a wider political process whereby the Western powers, particularly the United States,

have always tried to impose their own values and way of life onto other non-Western states, taking as an excuse their allegedly religious superiority as Christian states. This guilt by association is also expressed on the line 12 "you're muslim until it's too dangerous." The poem focuses on this ignorance, which regards all Muslims as a homogenous group and fails to see that, although the 9/11 hijackers may have defined themselves as followers of the Islam faith, they were nonetheless economically, traditionally and culturally different from most members of the Muslim diaspora. This is illustrated in Poole's (2002) study about the depiction of Islam by the media as a monolithic structure, mono-cultural rather than diverse and multi-cultural. Pakistan in particular is seen as a hub of terrorist activity by many politicians, an idea which strongly affects the diaspora, as can be seen in the words uttered by Tony Blair, the British ex-Prime minister, when he said in an interview published in 2007 in *The Economist*: "What happens today in Pakistan matters on the streets of Britain."

The poem also speaks about cultural identity, and criticises once again the backward and Orientalist approach that regards South-Asian youth as the subversive 'other'; classmates do not even know or care about the difference between Pakistan and India. The poetic speaker therefore has to deal with this complexity and pain of (un)belonging through internal debates about being American, Muslim, Pakistani, Indian, Kashmiri, Seraiki, identities which are both explored and interchanged. It is the constant feeling of being seen as the 'other' that prompts the never-ending negotiation of identity and belonging, despite her official status as American-born. In the end, the poetic speaker goes as far as to doubt everything she knows: "maybe. you can't remember. you made it up" (line 9).

"Land Where My Father Died"

land of buildings & no good manners land of sunless people & offspring of colonisers land of no spice & small pox land of fake flowers land of shackle & branches made of rope land of wire fences grabbing sky land that mispronounces my grief land that skins my other land that laughs when my people die & paints targets on my future children's faces land that steals & says mine land that plants mines & says go back land that poisoned my mother & devoured her body land that makes my other language strange on my tongue land that stripped our saris & clips haloes to its flag land that eliminates cities land that says homeland security land that built the first bomb & the last land that killed my father & then sent back

his body land that made me orphan of thee I sing.

This poem hints at the American patriotic song *My Country, 'Tis of Thee* (also known as "America"), which includes the lines "Land where my fathers died" and "of thee I sing." The strong correlation between the two versions suggests that, although the poetic speaker is a member of the diaspora, she is equally entitled to reaffffirm herself as part of the American society, which refuses to accept her and keeps on treating her as a foreigner: "land that [...] says go back" (lines 5-6).

The poem is a compilation of paradoxes within the American society and its way of treating migrants, and it encapsulates the mixed feelings of the poetic speaker towards America, her country of birth, which nonetheless insists on treating her as an outsider, as the dangerous 'other.' The poetic speaker in the poem is the eternal outsider; she is repeatedly reminded of her external status, as illustrated in "land that skins my other land that laughs when my people die" (line 4). She, as a transmigrant, straddles East and West, she lives in "no man's land," which could be related, although here in a negative way, to Bhabha's aforementioned Third Space.

Another issue dealt with in the poem is that of the double standards that rule Western society: America preaches democracy and freedom on the one hand, but undermines previously colonised nations on the other, as is hinted in "offspring of colonisers" and "steals & says mine" (line 5).

The poem also deals with the issue of language: "land that makes my other language strange on my tongue" (line 7). In order to accommodate both East and West, the poetic speaker has to adopt, and sometimes adapt, the host language, while also trying not to let go of her past history, culture and language. This may be a difficult task to accomplish, as she feels compelled to speak the language of a society that does not fully accept her in order to prevent further persecution and alienation from that same society.

The portrait of 'the villain' in Western societies as a Muslim terrorist prompts anti-Muslim feelings. However, the poetic speaker contradicts this notion on line 9: "land that built the first

bomb." Discrimination based on the Islamic faith is present all through the global media as shown in the statement: "The 9/11 hijack trial has revealed an Al Qaeda 'conveyor belt' for young men who hate the West. British prisons, mosques and Imams are fertile ground for recruitment and motivation of terrorists. How much is foreign culture beneficial to British society?" (BBC Radio 4, 2006). The issue of bombing, related to extremism and terrorism, is a source of frustration for the poetic speaker as it perpetuates the stereotypes of the Muslim terrorist and of the internal Muslim threat in English-speaking countries.

4. Conclusion

This Final Degree Dissertation has tried to show how the present-day generation of the South-Asian diaspora, as represented by the diasporic authors discussed here, is dealing with social and political situations similar to those undergone by their parents. However, they approach them differently, as these individuals possess a rather more assertive outlook and attitude. As has been discussed in the previous sections, they do not simply accept their condition as outsiders, but raise their voice and demand to be heard and accepted. As citizens with equal rights, they criticise and denounce racism, Islamophobia and many other types of oppression, while asserting the strength of the diaspora when dealing with discrimination, whether overt or subtle. Moreover, they are not apologetic about being different; on the contrary, they celebrate their uniqueness and their multiple vision, mainly by creating a Third Space, that is, a liminal space that enables them to partake of more than one culture, and which consequently provides them with a privileged perspective. They have a rather more confident belief in being British/American or Canadian, and constantly try to balance and adapt their dual heritage within a contemporary Western context. Their higher self-esteem is mainly the result of having received a better education than their parents, and of having enjoyed a stronger social interaction with both other diasporic people and the host country's natives, many of whom are becoming rather more open-minded with the passing of time. It is these interactions that provide some positive counterbalance to the negative portrayals that Western societies have often given of their communities.

This dissertation has focused on the complexity of diasporic identity and its ever-changing nature, which cannot be possibly related to one specific physical location, as these transnational authors tend to move across different cultures. To understand these authors, multiple factors must be taken into consideration: ethnic, racial, social, political religious, gender, etc. As to their literary works, they also aim to describe, define, articulate and negotiate a transnational hybrid identity that conflates the private and public spheres, in an attempt to turn migrant communities into a most influential group in contemporary societies of all sorts. Theirs is an on-going task that strives to understand an ever-increasing complex world. Their increasing self-confidence testifies to a stronger sense of belonging, which nonetheless dares to put this very sense of belonging to the test.

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